



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Historic Cities Programme

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### NOH GUMBAD MOSQUE, BALKH

As part of a joint initiative between AKTC and the *Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA)*, a team of conservation architects and conservators spent 10 days at the Noh Gumbad mosque in Balkh during October. Funded by the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, the aim of this visit was to explore the condition and properties of the stucco decoration, which resembles Abbasid examples found at Samarra in Mesopotamia, on the surviving structure of this 10th-century mosque. A series of trials were conducted on the stucco (right) to identify appropriate techniques for safeguarding the decorated sections, while enabling the fragile masonry arches to which they are attached to be stabilized. Drawing on the findings of this work, it will be possible to formulate a technical strategy for the next stage of conservation, which will be implemented in spring 2010.



### MILMA PAL, KABUL

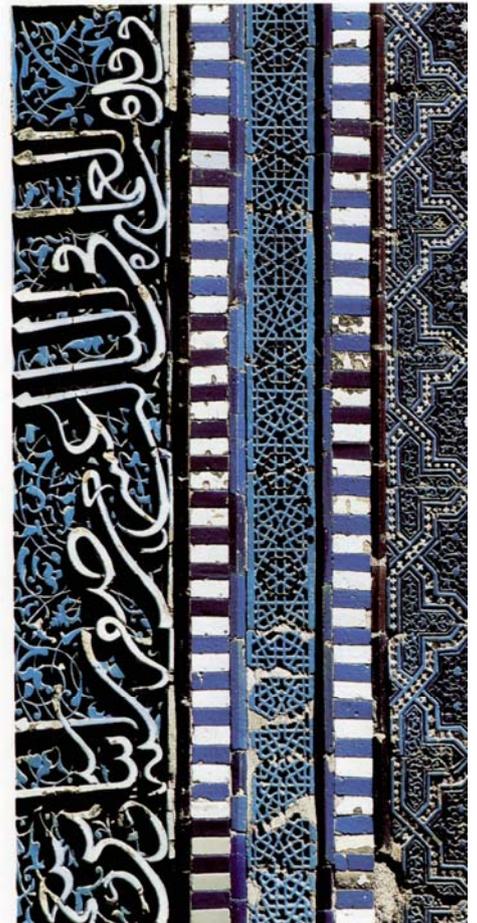
A grant from the Prince Claus Fund of the Netherlands has enabled AKTC, in conjunction with the Ministry of Information and Culture, to begin emergency repairs on the Milma Pal mosque in western Kabul. Dating from the late 19th century, when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan built a garden pavilion on the ridge above Baghe Bala, the mosque was used by members of the royal court. Following heavy rains in 2008, part of one of the brick domes over the mihrab collapsed, causing damage to moulded plaster decoration below. Repairs are under way on the roof, after which the plasterwork will be restored.



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### AFGHAN CULTURAL INITIATIVE

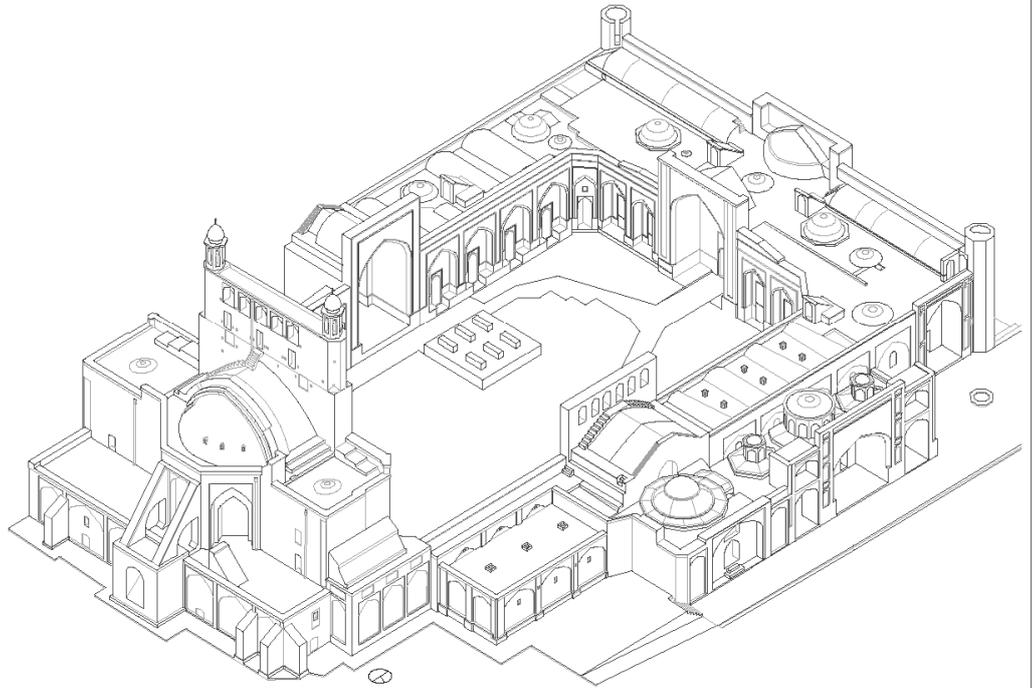
As part of a regular series of talks held in the restored Timur Shah mausoleum in central Kabul, the linguist and scholar Bruce Wannell made a presentation on 21st October on 'Calligraphy and Epigraphy from the rise of Islam to the Establishment of Durrani rule in Afghanistan'. Speaking to an audience of around 90 people, Wannell provided an illustrated account of the development of calligraphy from early Kufic script in the late 7th century to the more cursive styles that emerged with the use of paper in the 10th century. This included a discussion of how epigraphy came to be adapted to a range of materials and techniques, such as the exquisite glazed tile-work on a mausoleum at Shah-i Zinda, Samarqand (right) which dates from 1360. A booklet of the material assembled for the presentation has been printed for use by students of calligraphy. Part of the Afghan Cultural Initiative, which is supported by the government of Norway, the ongoing Timur Shah lecture series aims to share knowledge and promote debate about cultural issues.



## HERAT

### ANSARI SHRINE, GAZURGAH

At a ceremony presided over by HE the Governor of Herat, Yusuf Nooristani, religious and community leaders marked on 8th October the completion of AKTC's 4 year programme of conservation in Gazurgah, north-east of Herat. As well as a range of measures to safeguard the 15th century shrine complex of Khawaje Abdullah Ansari (see drawing on right), conservation work was carried out on the Zarnegar *khanegah*, the Namakdan pavilion and the Zamzam cistern. Extensive landscaping was also undertaken across the site in order to protect the many important graves, which have been documented. The programme in Gazurgah was funded by the government of Germany.



### PHOTO EXHIBITION IN HERAT

Following a successful exhibition in Kabul in April, a collection of photographs taken in Afghanistan by the renowned US photographer Steve McCurry is now on show in the restored Chahar Suq cistern in the heart of the old city of Herat. Supported by the US Embassy, the show was inaugurated on 10th October by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone and the Governor of Herat, in the presence of 200 Afghan and international guests.



For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us at Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah Street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat. [aktc.afg@akdn.org](mailto:aktc.afg@akdn.org)

### 2010 WORLD MONUMENTS WATCH LIST

In early October, the World Monuments Fund announced that the old city of Herat had been included in the 2010 World Monuments Watch. Intended to call international attention to threatened cultural heritage, the 2010 Watch lists a total of 93 sites deemed to be 'irreplaceable monuments to human culture' in 47 countries. In the submission dossier for the old city of Herat, mention was made of the accelerating pace of demolition of historic property and construction of inappropriate modern buildings which is transforming the unique historic fabric. Along with conservation work (see below) being undertaken by AKTC in the old city, it is hoped that the inclusion of Herat on the 2010 Watch will spur the relevant Afghan authorities to more effectively enforce construction controls, encourage the safeguarding of historic buildings and support the formulation of appropriate development plans for the old city.

